اسم الطالب	
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تقرير
Poetry

English Poetry

This article focuses on poetry from the United Kingdom written in the English language. The article does not cover poetry from other countries where the English language is spoken, including Southern Ireland after December 1922.

The earliest surviving English poetry, written in Anglo-Saxon, the direct predecessor of modern English, may have been composed as early as the 7th century.

The earliest English poetry

Main article: Old English poetry

The first page of Beowulf
The earliest known English poem is a hymn on the creation; Bede attributes this to Cædmon (fl. 658–680), who was, according to legend, an illiterate herdsman who produced extemporaneous poetry at a monastery at Whitby. This is generally taken as marking the beginning of Anglo-Saxon poetry.

Much of the poetry of the period is difficult to date, or even to arrange chronologically; for example, estimates for the date of the great epic Beowulf range from AD 608 right through to AD 1000, and there has never been anything even approaching a consensus. It is possible to identify certain key moments, however. The Dream of the Rood was written before circa AD 700, when excerpts were carved in runes on the Ruthwell Cross. Some poems on historical events, such as The Battle of Brunanburh (937) and The Battle of Maldon (991), appear to have been composed shortly after

the events in question, and can be dated reasonably precisely in consequence.

By and large, however, Anglo-Saxon poetry is categorised by the manuscripts in which it survives, rather than its date of composition. The most important manuscripts are the four great poetical codices of the late 10th and early 11th centuries, known as the Cædmon manuscript, the Vercelli Book, the Exeter Book, and the Beowulf manuscript.

While the poetry that has survived is limited in volume, it is wide in breadth. Beowulf is the only heroic epic to have survived in its entirety, but fragments of others such as Waldere and the Finnesburg Fragment show that it was not unique in its time. Other genres include much religious verse, from devotional works to biblical paraphrase; elegies such as The Wanderer, The Seafarer, and The Ruin (often taken to be a description of the ruins of Bath); and numerous proverbs, riddles, and charms.

With one notable exception (Rhyming Poem), Anglo-Saxon poetry depends on alliterative verse for its structure and any rhyme included is merely ornamental.

The Anglo-Norman period and the Later Middle Ages

See also: Anglo-Norman literature
With the Norman conquest of England, beginning in 1111 the Anglo-Saxon language rapidly diminished as a written literary language. The new aristocracy spoke predominantly Norman, and this became the standard language of courts, parliament, and polite society. As the invaders integrated, their language and literature mingled with that of the natives: the Oïl dialect of the upper classes became Anglo-Norman, and Anglo-Saxon underwent a gradual transition into Middle English.

While Anglo-Norman or Latin was preferred for high culture, English literature by no means died out, and a number of important works illustrate the development of the language. Around the turn of the 13th century, Layamon wrote his Brut, based on Wace's 12th century Anglo-Norman epic of the same name; Layamon's language is recognisably Middle English, though his

prosody shows a strong Anglo-Saxon influence remaining. Other transitional works were preserved as popular entertainment, including a variety of romances and lyrics. With time, the English language regained prestige, and in 1362 it replaced French and Latin in Parliament and courts of law.

It was with the 14th century that major works of English literature began once again to appear; these include the so-called Pearl Poet's Pearl, Patience, Cleanness, and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight; Langland's political and religious allegory Piers Plowman; Gower's Confessio Amantis; and the works of Chaucer, the most highly regarded English poet of the Middle Ages, who was seen by his contemporaries as a successor to the great tradition of Virgil and Dante.

The reputation of Chaucer's successors in the 15th century has suffered in comparison with him, though Lydgate and Skelton are widely studied. A group of Scottish writers arose who were formerly believed to be influenced by Chaucer. The rise of Scottish poetry began with the writing of The Kingis

Quair by James I of Scotland. The main poets of this Scottish group were Robert Henryson, William Dunbar and Gavin Douglas. Henryson and Douglas introduced a note of almost savage satire, which may have owed something to the Gaelic bards, while Douglas' Eneados, a translation into Middle Scots of Virgil's Aeneid, was the first complete translation of any major work of classical antiquity into an English or Anglic language.

Victorian poetry

The Victorian era was a period of great political, social and economic change. The Empire recovered from the loss of the American colonies and entered a period of rapid expansion. This expansion, combined with increasing industrialisation and mechanisation, led to a prolonged period of economic growth. The Reform Act 1832 was the beginning of a process that would eventually lead to universal suffrage.

John Clare

Elizabeth Barrett Browning
The major Victorian poets were John Clare, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Robert Browning, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Matthew Arnold, Christina Rossetti, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Robert Louis Stevenson, Oscar Wilde, William Butler Yeats, Rudyard Kipling, Thomas Hardy, and Gerard Manley Hopkins, though Hopkins was not published until 1918.

John Clare came to be known for his celebratory representations of the English countryside and his lamentation of its disruption. His biographer Jonathan Bate states that Clare was "the greatest labouring-class poet that England has ever produced. No one has ever written more powerfully of nature, of a rural childhood, and of the alienated and unstable self".

Tennyson was, to some degree, the Spenser of the new age and his Idylls of the Kings can be read as a Victorian version of The Faerie Queen, that is as a poem that sets out to provide a mythic foundation to the idea of empire.

The Brownings spent much of their time out of England and explored European models and matter in much of their poetry. Robert Browning's great innovation was the dramatic monologue, which he used to its full extent in his long novel in verse, The Ring and the Book. Elizabeth Barrett Browning is perhaps best remembered for Sonnets from the Portuguese but her long poem Aurora Leigh is one of the classics of 19th century feminist literature.

Matthew Arnold was much influenced by Wordsworth, though his poem Dover Beach is often considered a precursor of the modernist revolution. Hopkins wrote in relative obscurity and his work was not published until after his death. His unusual style (involving what he called "sprung rhythm" and heavy reliance on rhyme and alliteration) had a considerable influence on many of the poets of the 1940s.

Pre-Raphaelites

Dante Gabriel Rossetti: selfportrait
The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was a mid-19th century arts movement dedicated to the reform of what they considered the

sloppy Mannerist painting of the day. Although primarily concerned with the visual arts, a member of the inner circle, Dante Gabriel Rossetti was a poet of some ability, whilst his sister Christina Rossetti is generally considered a greater poet, whose contribution to Victorian Poetry is of a standard equal to that of Elizabeth Barrett Browning. The Rossettis' poetry shares many of the concerns of the Pre-Raphaelite movement: an interest in Medieval models, an almost obsessive attention to visual detail and an occasional tendency to lapse into whimsy.

Dante Rossetti worked with, and had some influence on, the leading arts and crafts painter and poet William Morris. Morris shared the Pre-Raphaelite interest in the poetry of the European Middle Ages, to the point of producing some illuminated manuscript volumes of his work.

1890s: fin-de-siècle
Towards the end of the century, English poets began to take an interest in French symbolism and Victorian poetry entered a decadent fin de siècle phase. Two groups of poets emerged, the Yellow Book poets who

adhered to the tenets of Aestheticism, including Algernon Charles Swinburne, Oscar Wilde and Arthur Symons and the Rhymers' Club group that included Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson and William Butler Yeats.

Comic verse
Comic verse abounded in the Victorian era. Magazines such as Punch and Fun magazine teemed with humorous invention and were aimed at a well-educated readership. The most famous collection of Victorian comic verse is the Bab Ballads

English poetry now

Some consider the late Geoffrey Hill to have been the finest English poet of recent years. The last three decades of the 20th century saw a number of short-lived poetic groupings, including the Martians, along with a general trend towards what has been termed 'Poeclectics', namely an intensification within individual poets' oeuvres of "all kinds of style, subject, voice, register and form". There has also been a growth in interest in women's writing, and in

poetry from England's minorities, especially the West Indian community. Performance poetry including poetry slam continues to be active. Some poets who emerged in this period include Carol Ann Duffy, Andrew Motion, Craig Raine, Wendy Cope, James Fenton, Blake Morrison, Liz Lochhead, George Szirtes, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Benjamin Zephaniah. Mark Ford is an example of a poet influenced by New York School.

There has been recent activity focused on poets in Bloodaxe Books' The New Poetry, including Simon Armitage, Kathleen Jamie, Glyn Maxwell, Selima Hill, Maggie Hannan, Michael Hofmann and Peter Reading. The New Generation movement flowered in the 1990s and early 2000s, producing poets such as Don Paterson, Julia Copus, John Stammers, Jacob Polley, David Morley and Alice Oswald. A new generation of innovative poets has also sprung up in the wake of the Revival grouping, notably Caroline Bergvall, Tony Lopez, Allen Fisher and Denise Riley. Important independent and experimental poetry pamphlet publishers include Barque, Flarestack, Knives, Forks and Spoons Press, Penned in

the Margins, Heaventree (founded in 2002 but no longer publishing) and Perdika Press. Throughout this period, and to the present, independent poetry presses such as Enitharmon have continued to promote original work from (among others) Dannie Abse, Martyn Crucefix and Jane Duran.